

A CASE STUDY OF THREE CHILDREN FROM
SINGLE-PARENT DIVORCED FAMILIES

A Field Report
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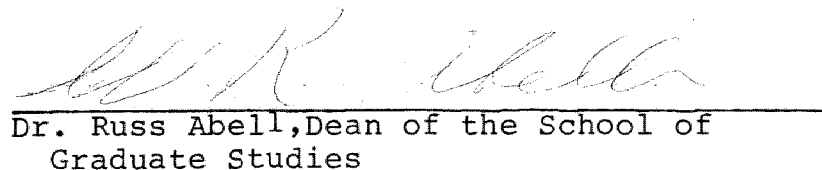
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An abstract of a Field Report of
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The problem. The problem of this study was to describe the home and school behavior patterns of children from two single-parent divorced families.

The procedure. A case study of three children from two single-parent divorced families was conducted for a period of ten months. Formal and informal observations and interviews were the methods used to gather data on behaviors identified in the literature of adolescent and later-latency children of divorce.

Findings. The behaviors of the two adolescents that were consistent with the literature were related to their role with the parents, their perceptions of the divorce, their adjustment, and their school performance.

The behaviors of the later-latency child that were consistent with the literature were related to the layering response; feelings; mastery by activity and play; anger, fears, and phobias; responsibility for the divorce; shaken sense of identity; loneliness and loyalty conflicts; somatic symptoms; changes in school performance; changes in the parent-child relationship; and empathy.

Conclusions. The children in this study had many of the behavioral difficulties identified in the literature as common for their age group.

Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
1. Introduction	1
Background	1
Review of Literature	2
2. Methodology	20
Statement of the Problem	20
Purpose	20
Method of Observation	20
Questions for Observations/Interviews	21
Type and Frequency of Observations/ Interviews	29
Definition of Terms	32
Limitations	33
3. Report	34
Findings	34
Summary	46
Bibliography	51

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background

The rate of divorce continues to increase dramatically. There is widespread concern mentioned for children caught in this dilemma. Educators, social workers, ministers, and other professionals are confronted with problems resulting from single-parent divorced families. There is a need to understand the effects that divorce has on children so that intervention can be provided. Professionals can be of assistance to both the parent and the child in adjusting to the dilemma.

As a result of divorce the practice of parenthood is profoundly altered even when remarriage takes place.¹ Children are experiencing painful separation from a natural parent due to dissolution of a family unit. In each stage of development adjustment depends on many factors. Having the knowledge of the effects upon children at different developmental stages can provide professionals with needed information to use in intervention as a support to the

¹ Frank F. Furstenburg, Jr., et al., "The Life Course of Children of Divorce: Marital Disruption and Parental Contact," American Sociological Review, 48 (Oct. 1983), 656-68.

families. Through these interventions children can continue to develop with less maladjustment due to the disruption. This study was designed to help people understand the home and school behavior patterns of children from single-parent divorced families through a case study of two families.

Review of Literature

Increasing marital instability, escalating divorce rates, and the resulting dissolution of nuclear families have left roughly 20 percent of all U. S. children under eighteen years of age--some twelve million of them--in one-parent households.¹ The U. S. Census Bureau estimates that about half of the children born in 1982 will live in one-parent homes sometime during their first eighteen years.² Nearly two out of every five children in the U. S. experience some form of family disruption by their middle teens. Almost nine out of ten of the disruptions occur as a result of marital dissolution.³ The increasing number of children of divorced families within this society poses the need for knowledge so that responsibility can be shared among those in contact with them.

¹ Barbara Bilgé and Gladis Kaufman, "Children of Divorce and One-Parent Families: Cross-Cultural Perspectives," Family Relations, 32 (Jan. 1983), 59-71.

² Robert D. Allers, "Children from Single-Parent Homes," Today's Education, 1982-83, Annual, pp. 68-70.

³ Furstenburg et al., pp. 656-68.

The incidence of children of divorce in a child psychiatric population was strikingly high--one third! The finding suggests that children whose parents divorce may be especially vulnerable to the types of developmental conflicts that eventually lead to psychiatric referral.¹

When a child loses a parent through divorce, the child's behavior will often be affected, if only for a time. In a five-year study of 131 children, Wallerstein and Kelly identified feelings and resulting behavior expressed by children. Pre-schoolers expressed fear, regression, and self-blame. Anxiety about leaving home to go to school, use of security symbols, and guilt behaviors were also prevalent.²

Young school-age children experienced grief, fear, yearning for the departed parent, and feelings of conflict in loyalty to the parents. Crying for no apparent reason, insecurity, and expressions of sadness accompanied these feelings.³

¹ Neil Kalter, "Children of Divorce in an Outpatient Psychiatric Population," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 47, No. 1 (Jan. 1977), 40-51.

² Judith S. Wallerstein and Joan B. Kelly, "The Effects of Parental Divorce: Experiences of the Preschool Child," American Academy of Child Psychiatry Journal, 14 (1975), 600-16.

³ Joan B. Kelly and Judith S. Wallerstein, "The Effects of Parental Divorce: Experiences of the Children in Early Latency," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 46, No. 1 (Jan. 1976), 20-32.

Divorce influences the psychological development of children and may result in the acquisition of certain abnormal behavioral and cognitive/perceptual patterns. Lower levels of pro-social, school-related behaviors and higher levels of inappropriate interpersonal and unusual behavior patterns were noted in a group of children which consisted of both boys and girls ages six through sixteen as compared to children from intact marriages.¹

Findings show father-presence within the first year after a parental separation was important for children ages three through thirteen. Loss of time with father in this time period has the potential for contributing to the psychosocial maladjustment of the child. The less time with the father, the higher the maladjustment of the child.²

In a study related to parents' perceptions of child-related problems, findings indicated behaviors tended to be disruptive to the family. The most frequent were discipline problems that were attributed to the separation, the ex-spouse's visit, and the availability of a same-sex

¹ Arnold L. Stolberg and James M. Anker, "Cognitive and Behavioral Changes in Children Resulting from Parental Divorce and Consequent Environmental Changes," Journal of Divorce, 7, No. 2 (Winter 1983), 23-41.

² Doris S. Jacobson, "The Impact of Marital Separation/Divorce on Children: I. Parent-Child Separation and Child Adjustment," Journal of Divorce, 1, No. 4 (Summer 1978), 341-60.

model.¹ These difficulties often led to extremely disruptive behaviors with significantly higher rates of delinquent sexual activity. Additionally, overt hostility toward parents was a much more frequent reason for referral to a psychiatric outpatient clinic. Among boys, this hostility appeared to extend to siblings in latency, and in adolescence, was transposed outside the home in encounters with the law. With girls, conflict with the parents was similar to the boys. In latency the aggression toward parents was present. In adolescence, girls showed higher rates of reported sexual behavior and drug involvement, as well as marked hostility toward parents. They were in considerably more turmoil and were acting in more self-destructive ways than their male counterparts.²

Both males and females were affected in their sex-role identification. Regardless of when the father absence occurred, the effects on daughters first appeared during adolescence. They were mainly manifested in an inability to interact appropriately with males. Girls spent more time in areas where males were most often found, but they did not participate in these male activities more.³

¹ Lawrence A. Kurdek and Albert E. Siesky, Jr., "Divorced Single Parents' Perceptions of Child-Related Problems," Journal of Divorce, 1, No. 4 (Summer 1978), 361-700.

² Kalter, pp. 40-51.

³ E. Mavis Hetherington, "Effects of Father Absence on Personality Development in Adolescent Daughters," Developmental Psychology, 7, No. 3 (1972), 313-26.

When father absence occurred before age four or five for boys, there was an affect on masculine development. Over-striving toward the traditional role of masculinity, frequently taking the form of aggressive acting-out behavior, was associated with sex role conflict. An example was that in impulse control, there was a preference for immediate gratification.¹

The social adjustment of children from divorce was related to their relationship with parents, with others, and to the availability of support systems such as extended families. In a study by Marjorie Pett, the strongest single correlate of the social adjustment scores of the children was the quality of the relationship to the custodial parent. Parents who rated the quality of their relationship with their children as satisfactory tended to rate these same children higher in social adjustment as well. The nature of the family's post-divorce experience also influenced the children's social adjustment. A more important issue for children in social adjustment was the custodial parents' intimate relationships with persons who had the potential of becoming a step-parent to the children. This issue appeared to make a greater contribution to children's adjustment than did the availability of a social

¹ Henry B. Biller, "Father Absence and the Personality Development of the Male Child," Developmental Psychology, 2, No. 2 (1970), 181-201.

network system such as the extended family.¹ In another study, the importance of social support systems was suggested to mediate the negative effects of single-parent family status on children's academic performance in relation to the emotional state of the child.²

There is evidence that father absence is associated with poor quantitative performance and weaker evidence that it may be associated with improved verbal performance in middle-class samples.³ Financial hardship, high levels of anxiety, and, in particular, low levels of parent-child interaction produce poor performance in children where the father is absent.⁴ The initial two years of life for both boys and girls were most significant in deficits of school performance when father absence occurred due to divorce, desertion, and separation.⁵ Whether from separation, divorce, or death, "crisis" groups of primary grade

¹ Marjorie G. Pett, "Correlates of Children's Social Adjustment Following Divorce," Journal of Divorce, 5, No. 4 (Summer 1982), 25-39.

² Crystal M. Roy and Dale R. Fuqua, "Social Support Systems and Academic Performance of Single-Parent Students," The School Counselor, Jan. 1983, pp. 183-92.

³ Marybeth Shinn, "Father Absence and Children's Cognitive Development," Psychological Bulletin 85, No. 2 (1978), 295-324.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ John W. Santrock, "Relation of Type and Onset of Father Absence to Cognitive Development," Child Development, 43 (June 1972), 455-70.

school children had a higher maladjustment in school when compared to a control group.¹ Negative peer relations, higher stress, and low work effectiveness were also found.

In examining family processes and child outcomes, the conclusion was that the greatest threat of divorce lies in the disruption of relationships with the parents. This interferes with the developmental process and presents both cognitive and emotional problems. These problems may persist long after adjustments have been made in the routines of daily life.²

A conclusion from a review of psychological literature was that many children do suffer during the time surrounding parental divorce, and that the nature of the distress appears to be age-specific.³ The effect of parents' relationships with their children during this time can be traumatic. Forty-four percent of 295 respondents in a questionnaire reported that they felt they had

¹ Robert D. Felner, Arnold Stolberg, and Emory L. Cowen, "Crisis Events and School Mental Health Referral Patterns of Young Children," Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 43, No. 3 (1975), 305-10.

² Robert D. Hess and Kathleen A. Camara, "Post-divorce Family Relationships as Mediating Factors in the Consequences of Divorce for Children," Journal of Social Issues, 35, No. 4 (1979), 79-96.

³ Deborah Anna Luepnitz, "Children of Divorce--A Review of the Psychological Literature," Law and Human Behavior, 2, No. 2 (1978), 167-79.

been "used" by one or both parents.¹ These same children expressed greater trauma if the home was considered happy.²

Effects of parental divorce on later latency, age eight to ten, and adolescent children age thirteen to nineteen were related more in detail for the purpose of this study. It was within this context, stressing the overriding importance of developmental continuity during each life phase, that understanding of the impact of parental divorce upon the children will rest. In later latency, the decision to divorce frequently ushers in an extended several-year period marked by uncertainty and sharp discontinuity. This has the potential to move the psychological and social functioning of the latency child into profound disequilibrium and painfully altered parent-child relationships.³ Latency is a difficult time in a child's life to try to grasp the concept that his or her parents are separating. It is a stage during which the intellectual capacity to comprehend reality is still developing as is the attempt to master and express feelings. The acceptance of reality might not be put in proper

¹ Judson T. Landis, "The Trauma of Children When Parents Divorce," Marriage and Family Living, Feb. 1960, pp. 7-13.

² Ibid.

³ Judith S. Wallerstein and Joan B. Kelly, "The Effects of Parental Divorce: Experiences of the Child in Later Latency," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 46, No. 2 (April 1976), 256-69.

perspective, and the expression of feelings may not be possible or appropriate.¹

Wallerstein and Kelly found certain layering responses in a detailed study of children in later latency. The layering responses, which were efforts to manage, emerged as ways of coping with the profound underlying feelings of loss and rejection. The children sought to manage by seeking coherence, by denial, courage, bravado, seeking support from others, keeping in motion, and conscious avoidance. All emerged as age-available ways of coping with the profound underlying feelings of loss and rejection, helplessness and loneliness. These responses only became visible within the context of several successive interviews. They were not readily discernible to the outside observer.² Children of this age have little control over their environment. It was found as a common theme of children that divorce made them feel small, weak, and vulnerable. Depression has either been found hidden or existing to a mild degree as an internalized reaction. Sometimes it was overt, as in the case of a child who constructed hangman's nooses and one who frequently threatened to swallow sharp objects he had put in his mouth or day-dreamed of killing himself. In some children, hidden depression was seen through accident-

¹ Marilyn Hrymak and Laura S. Smart, "Helping Elementary Teachers Understand Children and Divorce," Illinois Teacher, March/April 1984, pp. 135-37.

² Wallerstein and Kelly, "Later Latency," pp. 256-69.

prone behavior. More subtle were the masked symptoms of fatigue and boredom.¹

Anger was a more obvious response, usually conscious and intense. It was well organized, clearly object-directed, and articulated with striking capacity. Increased temper tantrums, scolding, diffuse demanding, and dictatorial attitudes were behaviors aimed at either or both parents. These expressions were usually from households where the father carried responsibility for a harsh and frightening discipline. Much of the anger was at the parent whom the child thought initiated the divorce.² At times, anger was used to cover sadness.³

Intense feelings of sadness, rejection, loss, helplessness, and loneliness were found.⁴ These feelings were associated with their efforts to manage their situation. Later latency children sometimes lie to cover their feelings of shame.⁵

In order to deal with the divorce, later latency children attempted to master their feelings by activity and

¹ John F. McDermott, Jr., "Divorce and Its Psychiatric Sequelae in Children," Archives of General Psychiatry, 23 (Nov. 1970), 421-27.

² Wallerstein and Kelly, "Later Latency," pp. 256-69.

³ Joan B. Kelly and Judith S. Wallerstein, "Children of Divorce," National Elementary Principal, Oct. 1979, 51-58.

⁴ Wallerstein and Kelly, "Later Latency," pp. 256-69.

⁵ Ibid.

play. Intimidation, manipulation, aggressiveness, demanding or commanding, and arguing gave them a sense of control and power. Establishing themselves as leaders over their peer group in play activities strengthened this intense need.¹ Conduct problems showed up at home and school and negativism, manifesting in verbal and physical aggression, increased during the early years and then became level during the later years of school.²

If a child was worried about being forgotten or abandoned by both parents, fears and phobias surfaced. Reliance on one rather than two parents created less security. There was concern that their specific needs were likely to be overlooked or forgotten.³ In a self-report from children, feeling upset produced more problems in the divorced families than in the intact families.⁴

Studies related to children perceiving the divorce as their responsibility are inconclusive. Wallerstein and Kelly found only a few expressing concern about having caused the divorce.⁵ However, another group of children illustrated

¹ Wallerstein and Kelly, "Later Latency," pp. 256-69.

² John Touliatos and Byron W. Lindholm, "Teacher's Perceptions of Behavior Problems in Children from Intact, Single-Parent, and Stepparent Families," Psychology in the Schools, 17 (1980), 264-69.

³ Wallerstein and Kelly, "Later Latency," pp. 256-69.

⁴ David M. Young and Gordon L. Bodie, "The Accuracy of Parents' Perceptions of Children of Divorce," Early Child Development and Care, 13 (1984), 309-20.

⁵ Wallerstein and Kelly, "Later Latency," pp. 256-69.

and went beyond the concept of assuming guilt for the divorce. Their needs to become responsible for the divorce were acted out in stealing.¹ Feeling some degree of blame for the parents' divorce at the time of separation did not continue to be a persistent response.²

The self-image and identity which, in later latency, was still organized around the idea that "I am the son of John and Mary Smith" was profoundly shaken by the severance of the parental relationship. The conception of personal identity was closely tied to the external family structure and developmentally dependent on the physical presence of parental figures.³ Some identification problems shifted to that of the loved object who was renounced. For example, some children ran away immediately after a visit with the father, especially if the father had quit the family and himself set a precedent.⁴

Pronounced loneliness from a sense of being left and loyalty conflicts relating to the child's perceived need to take sides, left the child in an isolated state. There was a perception of parental withdrawal of interest as parents became preoccupied with their own needs and one

¹ McDermott, pp. 421-27.

² Young and Bodie, pp. 309-20.

³ Wallerstein and Kelly, "Later Latency," pp. 256-69.

⁴ McDermott, pp. 421-27.

was gone.¹ Time lost in the presence of the father had a significant effect on the adjustment of the seventeen-to-thirteen-year old.²

Of all the effects of divorce on children, school performance has been the most reported and emphasized. Studies report a noticeable decline in school performance as well as social adjustment. These studies were marked by decreased concentration in class and increased aggression on the playground.³ High levels of anxiety were revealed in restlessness, increases in day-dreaming, expressed anxiety to the detriment of peer relationships, and the seeking out of teachers for needed attention.⁴ The children revealed greater school maladjustment,⁵ greater stress and less productive work styles,⁶ conduct problems,⁷ and less social and academic competence.⁸ Boys from divorced families were found to experience

¹ Wallerstein and Kelly, "Later Latency," pp. 256-69.

² Jacobsen, pp. 341-60.

³ Wallerstein and Kelly, "Later Latency," pp. 256-69.

⁴ Kelly and Wallerstein, "Children of Divorce," pp. 51-58.

⁵ Felner, Stolberg, and Cowen, pp. 305-10.

⁶ Hess and Camara, pp. 79-96.

⁷ Touliatos and Lindholm, pp. 264-69.

⁸ John Guidubaldi et al., "The Impact of Parental Divorce on Children: Report of the Nationwide NASP Report," School Psychology Review, 12, No. 3 (1983), 300-23.

greater behavioral, social, and academic difficulties in comparison with both girls from divorced families and boys from intact families.¹ Authoritarian custodial parents had children who were described on teacher ratings as higher in intellectual dependency, but lower in originality, independent learning, and productivity.²

Effects on the cognitive development of children from divorced families were related to father-absence. Boys whose fathers were absent because of divorce, desertion, or separation scored lower on third-grade achievement tests than boys whose fathers were present. The same pattern of findings emerged in most comparisons of father-absent and father-present children on cognitive measures.³

The changes that took place in parent-child relationships were many. They varied according to custodial-parent versus absent-parent, amount of time spent with each parent, relationships with significant others, and relationship of the parents. Alignment often occurred to coerce the other parent to return or as an expression of vengeance. Identifying one parent as good and one as bad assisted the child in identifying with a particular parent. Expressions of certain attitudes to hurt, reject, confront, forgive, comfort, or affirm served as the magnet to draw

¹ Guidubaldi et al., pp. 300-23.

² Ibid.

³ Santrock, pp. 455-70.

the child to the parent. Children empathized with a parent through sensitivity, frequent expressions of affection, and expressed needs for equal treatment with other siblings.¹

Commonality of response seemed to be related to the development of the adolescent group. It represented that aspect of adolescent functioning devoted to active mastery of, and adaptive coping with, the disorganizing impact of the divorce.² While normal adolescent development involves the disengagement from the primary love objects and the accompanying move toward heterosexual object choice, divorce shortened the normally available time span for the gradual accomplishments of these tasks.³ Because of this, feelings of loss, emptiness, and loneliness were exacerbated. Intense anger to the point of rage was expressed to defend against such feelings of loss. In the process a precipitous de-idealization of the parent occurred which generated angry criticism of at least one of the fallen parents.⁴ The adolescent assumed the role of ally, friend, or confidante of one parent, the enemy of one parent,

¹ Wallerstein and Kelly, "Later Latency," pp. 256-69.

² Judith S. Wallerstein and Joan B. Kelly, "The Effects of Parental Divorce: The Adolescent Experience," in The Child in His Family, ed. E. James Anthony and Cyrille Koupernik, 3 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974), pp. 479-505.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

or the intermediary between the parents.¹ Loyalty conflicts with parents were associated with the behavioral response.² The relationship with the father suffered most because children of divorce thought less well of him than did children whose fathers had died or those from intact families.³ One of the disadvantages most frequently listed by a group of adolescents was that they were not close to their fathers.⁴ An example was the suffering of the adolescent daughters from the father being absent in the family. The effect was reflected mainly in disruptions in interactions with males. In the daughters of divorcees, this took the form of proximity seeking and attention seeking from males, early heterosexual behavior, and various forms of non-verbal communications associated with openness and responsiveness.⁵

¹ Patricia Patten-Seward, "Assessing Student Emotional Behavior after Parental Separation or Divorce," Journal of School Health, 54, No. 4 (April 1984), 152-53.

² Stephanie S. Farber, Judith Primavera, and Robert D. Felner, "Older Adolescents and Parental Divorce: Adjustment Problems and Mediators of Coping," Journal of Divorce, 7, No. 2 (Winter, 1983), 59-75.

³ Frederick G. Rozendal, "Halo vs. Stigmas: Long-Term Effects of Parent's Death or Divorce on College Students' Concept of the Family," Adolescence, 18, No. 72 (Winter, 1983), 974-55.

⁴ Benjamin Schlesinger, "Children's Viewpoints of Living in a One-Parent Family," Journal of Divorce, 5, No. 4 (Summer 1982), 1-23.

⁵ Hetherington, pp. 313-26.

The main focus of school performance studies was reflected in the adolescent's perception of its effect on the future. For example, adolescents from divorced families did less well academically, liked school less, and expected to go less far in their studies. Thus, they were less optimistic both about their distant and immediate future.¹ Generally, school performance was affected negatively. Studying became a dislike and future plans were obscure.² Results indicate that adolescents from divorced families expected the future to be less good than did adolescents from intact families. This was true in terms of future overall success, special success, or material affluence.³ In adapting to parental divorce, female students were more concerned than male students with career and/or marriage choices.⁴

The most reported effects of divorce on adolescents were emotional and resulting behavioral response. At a time that adolescents are struggling to become adults, their autonomy needs protection. Divorce projects the presence of parents into their developmental progress. The resulting

¹ Jean-Francois Saucier and Anne-Marie Ambert, "Parental Marital Status and Adolescents' Optimism About Their Future," Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 11, No. 5 (1982), 345-54.

² Patten-Seward, pp. 152-53.

³ Saucier and Ambert, pp. 345-54.

⁴ Farber, Primavera, and Felner, pp. 59-75.

responses were expressed in anger, sadness, and a sense of loss and betrayal by either/or both parents. Many of the adolescents made use of distancing and withdrawal as defenses against experiencing the pain of the family disruption.¹ Emotional difficulties, such as depression, anxiety, and feelings of abandonment and insecurity, were seen in the same adolescents experiencing behavioral problems.

Behaviors from divorce were increased drug and alcoholic usage, sleeping and eating disturbances, and an inability to concentrate on studies.² Other studies found depression or unhappy moods³ and females' feelings of insecurity.⁴ There were also feelings of upset, unhappiness, confusion, sadness, worry, and relief.⁵

¹ Wallerstein and Kelly, "The Adolescent Experience," pp. 479-505.

² Farber, Primavera, and Felner, pp. 59-75.

³ Saucier and Ambert, pp. 345-54.

⁴ Hetherington, pp. 313-26.

⁵ Schlesinger, pp. 1-23.

CHAPTER 2

Methodology

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to describe the home and school behavior patterns of children from two single-parent divorced families.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify behavior and emotional responses of children from single-parent divorced families so that support programs and guidance could be developed to assist parents and children in more effective adjustment. The review of literature revealed that children are in a state of crisis following divorce. This crisis varies by degree and length of time. Because there is an increase of children from single-parent divorced families, knowledge is needed by professionals who are involved with these families so they can provide needed support to assist them as they adjust to problems encountered from divorce.

Method of Observation

To approach the problem of possible behavioral differences in children of divorced parents, a case study was

conducted using participant/observer and investigator/observer methods. The participant/observer gained insights and personal relationships that could not have been achieved by other methods. The observer role was primarily as a participant. The observational activities were kept as unobtrusive as possible to the children. The investigator/observer gained information in relation to specific behavioral and emotional responses which were identified and defined. The role of investigator was confined mainly to the adults significant to the children. The rapport established with the families provided an openness and honesty that yielded valuable and pertinent information.

The first step to beginning the study was gaining the participation of single parents. Permission was acquired through the mothers to observe the children in various settings and to interview the children formally and informally. Important to the collection of data was the accessibility to other family members, teachers, and friends. Their cooperation was granted after permission from the mother.

Questions for Observations/ Interviews

A case study was conducted for a period of ten months. It involved two families with two adolescents in one family and a latency age child in the other. In both cases, the parents were in the process of separation and divorce during the time period of the study. Formal and informal interviews were conducted with the parents, children, extended

family and teacher. The formal interviews involved a set of questions identifying certain behavioral and emotional responses as identified in the literature search. These questions were asked and notes recorded at the time of or immediately following the interview.

Questions Related to the Adolescent

Role

1. Have they become the ally, friend, or confidant of one parent? Which parent?
2. Have they become the enemy of one parent? Which parent?
3. Have they become an intermediary between the parents?

Perception of Separation/Divorce

1. Have they expressed denial that it is happening?
2. Have they expressed disbelief that it is happening?
3. Have they withdrawn or disengaged from the situation?
4. Have they expressed themselves as the center of the situation? (How could they do this to me?)

Adjustment

1. How are the children adjusting?
2. How do you perceive each one's self-esteem?

3. Do they display absent-mindedness, nervousness, weariness, moodiness, withdrawal, declining grades, or acting out?
4. Have there been any reports of these from school?

Future Perspective

1. How do they view the future for themselves?
2. Have they expressed concern over their future as marital partners?

School Performance

1. How are they doing in their studies?
2. How do they like academics and studying?
3. What are their future school plans?

Behaviors

1. Do they display outbursts of anger, lying, drug or alcohol abuse or use, or somatic complaints?
2. What unusual general and specific behaviors are observed?
3. Have they begun to withdraw or isolate from parents, peers, or school?
4. Are they spending more time at home, at school, or with friends?
5. Do they seem depressed?
6. Has truancy become a part of their life?
7. Has sexual involvement become a part of their life?
8. Has there been any other maladaptive behaviors, such as running away or aggressiveness?

9. Do they manipulate either parent?
10. Do they over-protect either parent?
11. Do they express suicide in any way?

Questions Related to the Later-
Latency Child

Layering Response (Efforts to Manage)

1. How does he appear in poise, presence, and courage?
2. Does he perceive the reality of the separation and impending divorce?
3. Does he ask questions or make statements to get understanding in the order, coherence, and continuity of the family situation?
4. How does he react when talking to you about the divorce?
 - (a) Does he seem to be encouraging a relationship with a particularly "understanding" adult?
 - (b) Does he move parts of his body during the discussion or conversation?
 - (c) Does he express denial that it is happening?
 - (d) Is he reluctant to form close relationships with other adults that discuss the divorce with him?

Feelings

1. Does he express sadness, feelings of loss, rejection, helplessness, or loneliness?
2. How does he respond when his father leaves after they have been together?
 - (a) Seeking coherence
 - (b) Denial
 - (c) Courage
 - (d) Seeking support from others
 - (e) Keeping in motion
 - (f) Conscious avoidance

Feelings of Shame

Does he lie to cover for either parent?

Mastery by Activity and Play

1. Does he use intimidation, manipulation, aggressiveness, demanding, commanding, or arguing to deal with the situation?
2. Does his play activity indicate a need to gain power and control in the situation?

Anger

1. Is he well organized?
2. Does he verbalize his anger? If so, is it well articulated?
3. Toward whom does he express his anger? (mother, father, both)

4. Who does he perceive initiated the divorce?
5. Does he understand a real reason for the divorce?
6. Does he express a conflict in morals of parents divorcing?
7. Does he have temper tantrums, scolding, diffuse demanding, or dictatorial attitudes?
8. Has he expressed a relief of less discipline or difference in discipline since his father has been gone?
9. Has he assumed any "husband" roles such as protective or demanding attitudes, or similar behaviors?
10. Has he become more compliant or less assertive?

Fears and Phobias

1. Has he indicated being concerned that both parents will forget or abandon him?
2. Does he seem less secure with one parent?
3. Is he concerned that his specific needs are overlooked or forgotten?

Responsibility for Divorce

Does he display behavior that indicates the need to be punished?

Shaken Sense of Identity

1. Does he compare physical characteristics of either parent to himself?
2. Has there been evidence of lying or stealing?

3. Has there been any indication of concern for having to take care of himself?

Loneliness and Loyalty Conflicts

1. How did he find out about the separation and divorce?
2. How did he respond?
3. Has he expressed particular loyalty to either parent?
4. Has he indicated taking sides in any way?

Somatic Symptoms

Has he had any physical ailments or manifestations such as headaches, stomach aches, twitches, or similar behavior?

Changes in School Behavior

1. Has there been a deterioration in peer relationships? What age child does he play with the most?
2. Is his behavior different at school than at home?
3. Is he able to concentrate in a class as he did before?
4. Does he have problems with any particular academic discipline, such as reading, math, or other subjects?
5. Has he become more aggressive on the playground?

Changes in the Parent-Child Relationship

Alignment

1. Has he formed more of a relationship with either parent? Does he basically exclude the other?
2. Has he expressed attitudes to hurt, to reject, to confront, to forgive, to comfort, or to affirm either parent?
3. Does he see one parent as a good parent and the other as a bad parent?
4. With whom is he beginning to align?

Empathy

1. Has he shown sensitivity to either parent? How?
2. Does he express affection frequently?
3. Does he feel his dad gives equal treatment to all the children?

Questions for the Teacher

It this student--

1. starting fights?
2. being a generally helpful child?
3. tending to quit if the task is too difficult?
4. paying attention in class?
5. becoming physically aggressive with other children?
6. being considerate of other students and adults?

7. approaching difficult tasks expressing that he/she can't do them?
8. completing homework?
9. appearing to lack emotion?
10. concentrating on things?
11. getting easily upset by change?
12. seeming to be popular with other students?
13. attempting to be the center of attention?
14. appearing self-confident?
15. seeming to do things one would expect of children much younger?
16. appearing interested in school work?

Type and Frequency of Observations/
Interviews

The following page presents a figure with a conceptual model describing the types and frequencies of observations and interviews. Formal interviews involved asking a set of questions developed to focus on particular responses and behaviors of children whose parents had separated and/or divorced. A particular time was set aside with the person(s) to be interviewed. The information was recorded at the time of the interview.

Formal interviews were attempted with the later latency child. Lack of articulation and identity of feelings made the interviews awkward and uncomfortable. Three formal interviews were attempted before shifting to informal interviews.

Type and Frequency of Observations/Interviews

	Observations		Interviews	
	Formal	Informal	Formal	Informal
Adolescents	1) Home--twice monthly	1) Various activities several times monthly	1) Parents--twice monthly	1) Mother--average twice weekly; Father--average twice monthly
	2) School denied		2) Adolescents attempted	2) Adolescents weekly
	3) Peers' home average weekly			3) Friends and parents of friends--average of twice monthly
	4) Social activities several times monthly			
Later Latency Child	1) Home--twice monthly	1) Various activities at least weekly	1) Parents--mother twice monthly; denied access to father	1) Mother weekly; denied access to father
	2) School denied		2) Significant others: teacher, grandparents, sister monthly	2) Significant others: grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and sisters--at least weekly
	3) Play activities monthly		3) Child--attempted; total of three completed	3) Child--average weekly

The adolescents were resistant to the formal interview format. They did not appear for three consecutive scheduled appointments. This indicated a shift to the informal interview format.

The informal interviews were most effective for all three children. The interviews consisted of conversation and inquiry about their feelings, conditions, and behaviors centering on the divorce situation. The interviews incorporated the questions developed. They were conducted over the telephone, on planned visits, and during the numerous occasions of observation.

Formal observation included observing interaction with parents, peers, and siblings, as well as behaviors and responses emphasized in the interview questions. The information was recorded at the time of observation as inconspicuously as possible.

Formal observation followed the formal interview with the parents in the home. Neither set of parents allowed formal observation in the school setting. The interview with the teacher of the later latency child proved satisfactory. Additional observation opportunities of the later latency child were in play activities with peers in various settings such as sports, grandparents' home, camp, and after-school care.

Observing the adolescents interacting with their peers was possible in the peers' homes and various social activities. The school performance and study habits were

adequately related through the parents of the adolescents. The oldest adolescent attended school the first two months of the school year. The second adolescent's school attendance was interrupted by a six-week stay in an alcohol and drug treatment center.

The informal observations were reflective of the ethnological methods of research. Mental notation and later recording demanded optimum memory recall. Also, the rapport established as a trusted friend of the families provided a comfortable environment for natural responses and behavior of all three of the children. These occasions occurred at unscheduled times that centered upon informal gatherings of school and family origin. During the study, these occasions included recreation, dinner, church attendance, holiday settings, informal visits, and formal multi-family meetings.

Definition of Terms

1. Latency is defined as the ages between six to ten.
2. Adolescence is defined as the ages between thirteen and nineteen.
3. Single parent is defined as a person who is single because of divorce and has children as a result of marriage.
4. Father-absent is defined as a father not living at home with the child.
5. Participant/observer is defined as a researcher observing while actively participating with the subjects being studied.

6. Investigator/Observer is defined as a researcher using questioning as an investigative method of research while observing within the natural environment of the subjects being studied.

Limitations

1. A case study involved information on a limited number of subjects.
2. The discomfort of the subjects in the formal interviews hindered in-depth insight to emotional responses.
3. There was a time lapse between the observations and recording of notes.
4. Parent availability made formal scheduling difficult.
5. Only two age groups were studied.
6. Involvement in drugs and alcohol by the adolescents produced behaviors that may or may not have been related to divorce.
7. Behaviors identified in the school setting were through interviews and not observation.

CHAPTER 3

Report

Findings

The following is a profile of each family. To establish anonymity, initials will be used in place of names. The reporting was done by describing the findings in relation to the topics for each set of questions.

Mr. and Mrs. F. separated and divorced within the last ten months. This was the culmination of twenty-one years of marriage resulting in two children: J.M., age 16, and J., age 18. The relationship was plagued with problems resulting from an alcoholic husband who had several affairs and from an insecure wife. The relationship had grown closer because of the father's sobriety and conversion to Christianity. Financial difficulties surfaced and pressures fell on the family. Mr. F. became involved with another woman, and this began the initiation of separation which ended in divorce. Mrs. F. resisted the divorce for months, hopeful the marriage would work. Finally, drug and alcohol problems surfaced with the father and children. Within the year of separation and divorce, the father and children entered treatment centers for chemical addiction. The mother entered a center for co-dependency treatment. Mrs.

F. decided that divorce was best. The divorce was final April 1, 1986. The mother and the children relocated.

The months of separation were difficult for the adolescents. In establishing their role with their parents, there has been some vacillation. However, a balance has generally been maintained. J., the eighteen-year-old boy, initially was more the ally of his father. J. identified with his father's independence, which was manifested through an affair. He felt and received more freedom with the father. However, J. was very protective of the mother and wanted her to be happy. It concerned him when she did not socialize. J. later came to resent the affair his father was having and began to get closer to his mother. The alignment became equalized.

J.M., the sixteen-year-old girl, initially was also closer to her father, even to the point of developing a mother-daughter relationship with a girl-friend. After family counseling in treatment she began to align more with her mother, though not to the exclusion of the father. She expressed seeing her mother as perfect but restrictive. However, both children resented the father's relationship with the other woman, from both a moral perspective and being denied his presence in the family. Neither of the adolescents became the enemy of their parents, though there were times of anger and resentment. J.M. attempted to intermediate between the parents in the beginning because she wanted reconciliation.

In the inception of the separation and divorce, both adolescents expressed denial that it was happening. They were surprised and left with a feeling of helplessness and powerlessness. They came to accept the divorce without denial. They never expressed or indicated a disbelief that it was happening.

In withdrawing from the situation, J. spent more time with friends, and frequently had a relationship with girlfriends. He expressed that he went out more so as not to see his mother at home alone and unhappy. He withdrew from church attendance, which was on a weekly basis prior to the separation and divorce. He did not like people asking him about the divorce or how he was doing. He felt ashamed and resentful that people knew. J.M. spent much more time outside the home with friends, even to the point of breaking curfew frequently. Mr. F. perceived the abuse of drugs and alcohol as an escape and a withdrawal from the pain and reality of the family disruption.

J. had indications of feeling in the center of the situation. He expressed not being able to enjoy his social life because of feeling a responsibility and guilt in his mother being home alone. If the parents were together, he believed they would tell him to go out and have a good time. J.M. gave no indication of feeling that she was in the center of the situation. She did not perceive the separation and divorce as a personal persecution, but avoided it through withdrawal and denial.

The adjustment to divorce was similar for both children. The adolescents spent a great deal of social time together initially, though still conflicting as siblings. Their treatment allowed an avenue of exploration and expression of feelings they otherwise would not have had the opportunity to do. J.M. expressed her intense longing for the family to be reconciled, but was afraid to tell the father. They both came to accept the divorce as final and to adjust to new surroundings and life with a single parent.

J.'s self-esteem in the beginning was very low. His behavior indicated insecurity as perceived by both parents. After his treatment program and his mother's therapy, his self-esteem began to improve. He was able to see that life holds good things for him, and he became more sensitive to others' feelings. He became both motivated and encouraged, obtaining a new job that could lead to a promotion.

Initially, J.M.'s self-esteem appeared strong. She was outgoing and socially involved. During the family therapy sessions, she expressed responsibility for the divorce, loyalty conflicts, and confusion about the right thing to do. As time passed, J.M. felt she didn't have any friends and experienced difficulty staying off drugs and alcohol.

Consistent with the literature was the adolescents' perspective of the future. Neither J. nor J.M. perceived

the distant future as good or bad, a behavior enacted consistently throughout the separation and divorce. J. continued to look only at the short-range future. His plans were to keep a current job and rely on its opportunity for one level of promotion. He was concerned more about present financial needs than future financial security. Intellectually, he knew that future financial independence was necessary, but J. ignored the reality of it. J.M. lived for the day, perceiving the future as a concern neither in educational goals nor marital decisions. She talked about finishing high school and attending college, but not in realistic terms. She felt more secure about the future than J., which may have explained her lack of concern for it. At the moment, J.M. is taken care of, and this is sufficient for her.

In school performance, both children showed obvious responses such as declining grades. J. lost interest in school, disliked studying, and had poor study habits. His previous year was lost due to truancy and lack of interest. Also, he was in a serious automobile accident which caused him to miss the spring quarter. After going through drug treatment, J. decided not to return to school. His future plan was to take the GED and get a diploma, but there has been no effort to follow through with this plan.

The previous year saw academic failure for J.M. Though she began the 1986-87 school year with reasonable academic achievement, her grades began to decline by the

end of the first semester. After being in drug treatment, she returned to school but continued to do poorly. She was not motivated to study. Summer school attendance may have been required for J.M. to graduate, but she had no real educational goals beyond that.

Behaviors consistently displayed by both adolescents were moodiness, withdrawal, anger, and verbal acting out. These behaviors were observed at home and reported from school. Absentmindedness was a symptom prior to treatment, but this problem showed improvement. Drug and alcohol abuse remained a major issue in both children's behaviors since total abstinence was imperative to cure. Both occasionally "slipped" in their programs after coming out of treatment. Control continued to be a problem.

J.M. was initially engaged in sexual involvement with single and married men. During treatment she expressed a desire to leave the hospital and renew these relationships. However, if sexual involvement continued, there was no visible evidence.

J. had depression since the finalization of the divorce. The relocation from the home where they had lived for a number of years disturbed him. He showed more display of emotional reactions than J.M., repeatedly expressing the "gloominess" of being at home and seeing his mother's unhappiness. Continued guilt and feelings of responsibility for her happiness left him frustrated and depressed.

Anger from that frustration caused J. to express aggressiveness and conflict with his mother.

Manipulation was used in large portions by both these adolescents. Only when communication had increased and relationships eased between the parents did the manipulation decrease. Also, Mrs. F. learned to handle situations better and thus weakened the manipulative behaviors.

In conclusion, Mr. F. kept close contact and communication with the family. The parents aligned, so the children had the benefit of agreed consistency. The presence of the father alleviated problems that occurred when he was not available.

The second case study involved Mr. and Mrs. S. They were divorced after twenty-six years of marriage. The divorce became final after five years of marital problems because of financial difficulties and poor communication. Two separations had occurred, eleven months apart. There were four children in this family. The three older daughters were either married, working, or in college and no longer living at home. J.T., a son, was born late in marriage and was only ten years old.

Within the time frame of both separations and the final divorce, J.T. progressed from initial trauma to gradual acceptance of the break-up. In the layering response, he struggled in his coping. When the first separation occurred, he was greatly distressed. He expressed that his heart was dead, and he cried hard and

long. The reality of the situation was difficult for him to comprehend, but his acceptance came from the forced changes in his home life. The most obvious behavior was his lack of expression of feelings. This is typical of the latency developmental stage. J.T. attempted to manage the situation by constantly being in motion and by using conscious avoidance. He initially would ask his mother if she and his father could get back together, but then he would not initiate conversation about the divorce. If asked about it, he gave one-word answers and shifted the subject to his activities. His avoidance was also reflective in some denial of the divorce situation. The constant motion was displayed either through active play or a constant shifting from one activity to another. When conversation was initiated with him about the divorce, he would either move his feet, shift his body, or move his hands and fingers. There was little eye contact and his body was usually turned away.

His feelings were kept well hidden. His facial expressions were generally passive but with an obvious sadness. Boredom and fatigue were present unless he was involved with his peers. Mild internal depression was present when these behaviors were manifested.

J.T. expressed his anger mainly by scolding, demanding, and being dictatorial. These behaviors were directed toward his mother, whom he sees as being to blame for the divorce. He demanded that she get him what he wanted, even to the extent of insisting she marry someone who owned a toystore.

He scolded her for thinking only of herself and of what she wanted. He attempted to get his way by dictating to the mother what he was going to do. In attempting to master the situation, he would try to manipulate her by telling her that he was allowed to do more things when he was with his father. His demanding or commanding and arguing were only with his mother and were an attempt at gaining a sense of control.

In play activities with his peers, he established himself as the leader. He attempted to control them by being "bossy" and demanding. His general relationship with his peers was good, and he was considered popular at school. However, he was described as being obnoxious and "pushy" by individual children outside school. His primary interests were being with his friends and involvement in sports activities, which exhibited his withdrawal from and denial of the divorce.

Conduct problems appeared at school in January. He became verbally aggressive with his teacher. He challenged her authority and became more visible in the classroom. Important to note was that the conduct problem occurred shortly after the divorce was finalized. He was usually cooperative to the extreme in wanting to please the teacher. J.T. showed no physical aggression toward peers, though aggression was evident in studies describing children of divorce. In contrast, his peers were a most important part of his life.

Concern about being forgotten was reflected in his consistent accusations toward his mother. J.T. contended that she cared only about her friends and clothes. He accused her of not caring about the things he needed and then demanded that she get them for him. Concern for abandonment was reflected in his concern for his mother's safety. He worried about her walking after dark, as an example.

J.T.'s sense of identity manifested itself in extreme reliance on involvement with peers and sports activity. This changed from a need to be home and closer to his mother in the initial stages of the separation and divorce. After re-establishing contact with his father and having him frequently available, his attention diverted to his peers. There was also some expression of physical identity as J.T. compared his physical characteristics to those of his mother.

Though there was verbalized interest in J.T. from the parents, both were extremely pre-occupied with their own needs. After the second separation, Mr. S. ceased contact with J.T., who coped with his father's absence by saying he did not want to see or talk to him. After the father re-established his presence with J.T., the boy became more secure, less dependent on his mother, and freer to pursue his peer relationships.

Somatic symptoms were the most measurable because of their visibility. J.T. developed extreme eye-blinking after

the first separation. This disappeared after Mr. S. returned home. However, it re-appeared after the second separation and prior to school opening. It again disappeared after a few months. Throat noises appeared after the divorce, and these seemed to persist. These noises were related to the climax of the situation. In studies describing children of divorce, the somatic symptoms usually related to the conflicts and visits of the absent parent.

The most intense response that J.T. manifested took place in his school performance. Prior to the separation and divorce, he had no academic difficulties. Since the initial separation and divorce, he displayed a decline in grades, lack of concentration in class, increase in day-dreaming, and restlessness. He sought his teacher out for attention, struggled with school adjustment, and evidenced greater stress and less productive work styles along with some attempts at verbal aggression. He was poorly organized and did not follow through with tasks. He gave up easily if there was any difficulty with the directions or the learning concept. He displayed lack of confidence in his school work, showing particular problems with math and reading comprehension. J.T. was failing during the first year of separation. Tests were administered with results showing no apparent learning problems. He entered a new school this year that provided less academic pressure, but though his most recent school experience was more positive,

there was no improvement in academic performance. Initially, J.T. needed a great deal of reassurance from the teacher and frequented her desk throughout the school day. His attitude improved in the spring, but his sense of responsibility and work styles did not enhance his achievement. J.T. still exhibited intellectual dependency in the form of tutors and close supervision in his work.

Contrary to the reports of social difficulties at school expressed in various studies, J.T. had the opposite situation. He was popular with peers and manifested no aggression toward them. He did, however, establish himself as a leader.

The emotional stress of his father's absence and separation during his third-grade year created problems of development which continued. Even though the father became available and present for J.T., the problems created by his initial absence continued. It is important to note the stress that previous studies placed on the impact of father absence on the effect of cognitive development in the child.

The effects on the parent-child relationship were relative to the variables of the family situation. Mrs. S. was the present parent and worked. There was an extensive support system of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and friends. The mutual cooperation and communication of the parents evolved for J.T. Throughout the situational change, alignment with the parents shifted. The boy initially aligned

with his mother who provided care for him. The physical security was expressed by J.T. when he verbalized that he was too young to live with his father. With the father present, sensitivity and emotional alignment developed with Mr. S. Coercion on the mother to reconcile was expressed in demands "to love daddy," and statements like "he wants you back." He identified the mother as the bad parent because she caused the divorce. His behavior toward her was much more confrontational, whereas with his father, he expressed empathy through being sensitive to the hurt experienced. This alignment split was not consistent with information in the literature, since alignment is usually with one parent.

Summary

In reporting findings of behavioral responses of children in single-parent divorced families, literature search with the comparison of a case study was established. The results were reported in narrative form due to the more interpretive approach to the study.

Results indicate that there is consistency of behavioral and emotional responses of these adolescent and latency children to divorce. These responses appear to present developmental and adjustment difficulties for these children. Educators, doctors, ministers, and others can assist the children and parents through providing programs, guidance, and development of support systems. Continued studies on

the effects specific to age groups are needed so that greater assistance can be provided. In this study, the particular responses to separation/divorce and the findings are listed below.

Adolescents

1. Role--Both of the adolescents aligned with the mother, but not to the exclusion of the father.
2. Perception of Separation/Divorce--Both adolescents expressed denial. They withdrew through spending an increased amount of time with friends and avoiding family activities. J. believed that he was in the center of the situation because the separation/divorce interfered with his social life. J.M. did not believe that she was in the center of the situation.
3. Adjustment--Both adolescents had difficulty adjusting. Poor self-esteem was evident in both. Moodiness, withdrawal, anger, and verbal acting out were displayed. Declining grades were most visible to the point of J. dropping out of school.
4. Future Perspective--Both adolescents had a short-range perspective of the future. Neither perceived the future beyond the present, thus, they expressed no concern over their future.
5. School Performance--The last two years were characterized by declining grades for both the adolescents. J. dropped out of high school due to failure. J.M. has managed

to survive though her study habits were extremely poor. Neither adolescent had any concrete future plans for education.

6. Behaviors--Anger, lying, drug and alcohol abuse, withdrawal from parents, increased time spent with friends, depression, sexual involvement (for J.M.), and manipulation of parents were persistent for the adolescents.

Later Latency

1. Layering Response--The later latency child reflected denial through avoidance of discussion of the divorce and lack of expression of feelings.

2. Feelings--J.T. did not verbally express his feelings. Sadness was evident in his facial expression though passivity was generally present. Boredom, fatigue, and internal depression were manifested in the presence of adults. Constant motion was typically characteristic of his behavior.

3. Feelings of Shame--There were none expressed in lying by J.T.

4. Mastery by Activity and Play--The later latency child established himself as the leader with his peers to assume power and control in the play activity. He used manipulation, demanding, commanding, and arguing with his mother in getting control at home. He was verbally aggressive with his teacher shortly after the divorce was finalized.

5. Anger--Anger was expressed in scolding and dictatorial attitudes with his mother, whom he perceived as the initiator of the divorce. He never verbalized his anger, but displayed demandingness and disorganization.

6. Fears and Phobias--Fear was manifested in J.T. through accusations toward his mother. He contended she did not care for his needs, only her own. He worried about her safety as a fear of abandonment.

7. Responsibility for Divorce--He displayed no behavior indicating being responsible for the divorce.

8. Shaken Sense of Identity--The later latency child compared his physical characteristics with his mother. His identity manifested itself in extreme reliance on involvement with peers and sports activity.

9. Loneliness and Loyalty Conflicts--Loneliness was not evident. Loyalty was expressed in emotional support to his father.

10. Somatic Symptoms--Extreme eye-blinking and throat noises were present in the later latency child.

11. Changes in School Performance--A decline in grades, lack of concentration in class, increased day-dreaming, restlessness, seeking the attention of the teacher, school adjustment struggles, increased anxiety, less productive work styles, some verbal aggression, disorganization, lack of confidence, extreme difficulties in mathematics and comprehension, and intellectual dependency have characterized the latency child's academic experience in response to

the divorce. His social response at school was manifested in positive peer relationships.

12. Empathy--Sensitivity toward his father through the mutual hurt experienced manifested in empathy from the later latency child.

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